

Our Time

INCORPORATING POETRY AND THE PEOPLE

November 1942

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF SOVIET CINEMA

by HERBERT MARSHALL

WHAT I BELIEVE

by DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

AND CRITICAL ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST

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Our Time *November 1942*

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A MONTH AGO, WRITING THE EDITORIAL notes for October, we referred to the failure of the Nazis to capture Stalingrad. When the edition was published it was still true, and now, as we go to press for the November issue, Stalingrad still holds, and time for the Germans is running short. Military observers and critics speak of quantities and qualities of tanks and aircraft, stress the fact that "the Russians have always been excellent hand-to-hand fighters," and conclude by a tribute to the magnificent resistance of our gallant allies. But they have not explained the miracle, nor have they told you why the overwhelming strength of the Nazis is cheated of an essential victory.

The answer is not an easy one, and cannot be found by any examination of the immediate situation, however closely it may be made. To find this answer we must go back a long way, and we must leave the specialised field of military technique and production. For the Germans, a complete disregard of human nity, have reached a pitch of

military organisation and dictatorial power in production which is unlikely to be excelled anywhere in the world. But that is not enough. Stalingrad has been held in spite of this; in spite of the loss of a great proportion of Russian industrial and productive power. The Soviet soldiers and their comrades-in-arms from the factories and workshops, who have lost almost everything to save Stalingrad, were supported in their fight by the very thing they were fighting for: a deep belief in humanity. They knew beyond all possibility of doubt that the finest thing in the world for which mankind could aim was not military domination; was not power for its own sake, but the life in which all human beings could share the greatest achievements of the human race.

In this issue we are glad to reprint an article by Dmitri Shostakovich, in which this great young musician tells the world something of what is in the heart of Russia to-day. The many peoples who make up the Soviet Union have succeeded in

keeping a rational balance in their outlook. Military power has no meaning beyond the spirited defence of their civilisation; industrial power is to enrich not the few privileged people, but everyone who is responsible for producing it. It is clear from the message of Shostakovich why national unity exists in its highest form in the Soviet Union. He stresses what we in this country have often overlooked, the common inheritance and common possessions of all people, irrespective of whether they are soldiers, factory workers, or artists. There is no division in their society. Music, ballet, theatre and art in general belong to all who can appreciate them and need them, and every facility has been offered to enable the maximum number of people to appreciate them. The cultural worker in Russia has a certain knowledge that he is an essential member of society, that the tasks he has to perform are as much part of the national life as those of any other worker. Can we say the same?

The war has revealed many divisions in the life of this country. A life in which culture plays an important part has always been the privilege of a few; the remainder have seldom been considered by those in power, and they themselves have accepted a position which denied these things to them. The call for national unity to-day cannot admit of any such breach, and it can only be healed by a new attitude to the whole question. The aim of the creative and interpretative artist must be directed at the greatest and widest audiences possible. These potential audiences must no longer merely accept the forms of entertainment offered to them; only by demanding the best available will they be satisfied; only by insisting that the duty of the artist is to work

for them, to give meaning to their toil, will they realise that unity in the fight for fascism is not a political slogan, but an essential for survival. It is even more, it is an essential for the peace which will follow.

Many artists to-day have failed in their responsibilities. Many have turned their backs on the work which they alone can do, and have looked for some more obvious duty in the struggle. To do this was to deny all that they were fighting for. The people of Moscow and Leningrad are gathering wood for the winter; but they will not sit lonely in their rooms at night, for Opera, Ballet, Concerts and Drama will be prepared for them, so that they may share in the common life of the whole nation. Stalingrad may be no more than a heap of burning rubble, but those who are still holding it and those who have died for it have known that their sacrifices have been for the safety of a civilisation of which the finest flowers are for all.

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On reading through the contents of this issue of *OUR TIME*, with its proud statement by Shostakovich, and the recounted history of the twenty-five years of Soviet cinema, set against the sad decline of French music, the imitative bewilderment of the British theatre, and the disappointing deterioration in British ballet, we may well suffer from a feeling of depression at our cultural failure to get anywhere. We see the dead hand of commercialism petrifying so much of our work, playing fast and loose with public taste and appreciation, while even the best of our achievements are warped and stunted by the pressure of economic considerations.

Yet we know that we are a people of vitality, of poets and writers, with a musical history which, although it stopped short so long ago, is still

something to warm the national heart. We know, too, that new movements in art are even now coming into being, popular movements which have in them the same germ of development as those which have flourished so amazingly in the Soviet Union. But, however strong the force of these movements may be, they cannot succeed unplanned, nor can the plans be effective unless they are laid on the basis of experience.

OUR TIME does not aim at being merely so many pages of pleasant reading. It aims at becoming the conscious voice of all efforts to build a national people's culture, which at this moment will be a vivifying force in the effort to victory, and which will later become the rallying point for rebuilding in peace. We shall not achieve this alone; the help of our readers throughout the country will be essential. It is not, let us hasten to add, financial assistance we are asking for, but a closer touch which will keep us informed of all that is happening in various parts of the country. We know what the large orchestras are doing, we hear something of interesting theatrical ventures, of the writings of well-known authors, but much is growing in

smaller and out-of-the-way fields, much that, while less in individual bulk, goes to provide grain for a great cultural harvest.

As the offensive movement against fascism spreads from the Eastern Front to North Africa and the Mediterranean, the prevailing mood and morale improve, and a new vigour is perceptible. Absenteeism in production, and the absentee mentality everywhere, is on the decline, and the frustration in our cultural life will disappear. But as the successful use of arms and production depends on a clear sense of direction based on a full knowledge of resources, so any advance in our cultural life must take full account of all that is going on.

OUR TIME will need its readers' criticisms, as well as general information. Much of the material published will be provocative, and without a positive reaction from readers, ideas will vanish into thin air. This must not happen. Letters, articles and reportages from readers will be carefully considered, and a Readers' Forum will be opened to give expression to the most vital contributions. Remember that OUR TIME is your magazine, and take your place in its pages!

What I Believe *By Dmitri Shostakovich*

In this article, which is reproduced from the American magazine *New Masses*, the great Soviet composer defines the place of the Soviet artist in the battle against the invader.

THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR WE ARE now conducting against German fascism, the most dangerous enemy mankind ever had, has served to unify and bring closer than ever before all the nations inhabiting the U.S.S.R.

The Russian people to which I belong were always distinguished by their undying interest in science, culture, and arts. We are proud of our science: it has contributed a great deal to human thought. We are proud of our literature: it has created heroes reflecting the entire development of human society. We are proud of our music and our arts: they gave the world works of inimitable strength and became some of the most precious contributions to the treasury of world culture. Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Tchaikowsky and Glinka, Moussorgsky and Repin, Pavlov and Setchenov—a whole Pleiad of magnificent creators in science and cultures—are all sons of my people. Suvorov and Kutuzov, two great military leaders who repeatedly vanquished the enemies of our country, glorified Russian arms and made famous the heroism of the common Russian soldier—all sons of my people. There is virtually no single sphere of culture, science,

military arts in which my people have not contributed glorious pages and given mankind magnificent monuments.

The war forced upon us by the contemptible Nazis has aroused in our people not only wrath and hatred against the invaders. It has called forth a great upsurge of creative activity and kindled the flame of daring thought. Our people know no fear in this struggle. Thousands of heroes go into battle for our country and, without sparing their lives, fight with a courage and fearlessness that electrify the whole world. At the front, in advanced positions, and behind the fighting lines, the people of our country display not only the greatest moral stability, courage, and devotion, but also a tremendous force of creative spirit and constructive might. And this strength of theirs brings us the certainty that no matter what trials we may have to suffer, no matter what burdens of war may fall upon our shoulders, we will stand it all, fight, and overcome it all, and we will emerge victorious.

A creative people, a constructive people, a people of great natural shrewdness and perseverance is angry and has put the entire genius of its

wisdom and all-penetrating inquisitiveness to work in the fight against the enemy. Upon us, art workers, children of our people, raised and nurtured by it, fall duties whose entire measure we have not as yet fully grasped. The word of the writer and publicist must become as hot as molten metal, as sharp as the warrior's sword, as well aimed as the shot of a sniper. The painter's picture must be as sincere and truthful as the conscience of any honest son of our people, as beautiful as only youth can be. Our composers' melodies must be as pure as the souls of our people raised on concepts of honour and nobility. By every means available to the artist, we must rouse in our people the spirit of faith in the triumph of their task, rouse their forces, and summon them to heroic achievements in battle and in labour.

The indispensable condition for the success of our workers in arts, workers small and great, known and unknown, lies in the indissoluble brotherly ties with our people. No artist can create anything of significance if he is isolated from the people, if he tries to escape the events of the day in some ivory tower. The artist thus isolated from the people, from their thoughts and dreams, hopes and aspirations, who escaped the stern facts of war, is inevitably condemned to creative stagnation, to a miserable existence. The artist dies as soon as he becomes an introvert.

The great masters of culture whose names we honour, and whose thoughts have been for us a book of learning and great revelations, have always distinguished themselves by the fact that they knew their people, shared their joys and griefs, felt their living impulses, and were always in the front ranks of all the people's struggles. And they, these masters of word and brush, music and stage,

loved their people, suffered with their agonies, wept with their tears, were stirred with their passions, and burned with their dreams and thoughts. Pushkin has no more remarkable pages than those in which he wrote of his love for country and people. Gogol, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, have no more colourful pages than those in which they spoke of their compatriots, the Russian folk, the Russian people, the Russian soil. The works of the great Russian composer Glinka, that most modest of all composers, were so closely linked with the creative efforts of the people that he used to say: "We do not create, the people create; we only record and arrange." The great lyricist and master of musical art thereby underscored his close ties with the Russian people and their magnificent wealth of creative effort.

And yet these ties do not signify that the artist simply borrowed from the creative genius of the people. For the composer, for example, it does not mean simple use of folk lore. Tchaikowsky's great works, his six symphonies, the ballet suites, "The Sleeping Beauty," "The Swan Lake," "The Nutcracker Suite," essentially do not contain any folk lore. They were not borrowed from Russian folk songs. Yet they are deeply national works and we all accept them as such. To learn ceaselessly from the people, to grasp everything the people create, to be worthy of the time period in which we artists live—therein lies our task.

The future historian of our days will note one special circumstance; in a country engaged in fierce struggle against a deadly enemy, fighting on land, in the air, and on water, for its freedom and independence, putting forth the greatest efforts of all of its citizens, the life of science, art and culture did not slow up, did not

quiet down. On the contrary, the patriotic upsurge enveloping the peoples of the Soviet Union became a remarkable soil in which, during these days of war, rise ever newer achievements in art. Our theatres work a great deal, produce new plays, work out new characters, and awaken in our people noble and heroic sentiments. Along with the presentation of new works, we continue carefully and painstakingly the presentation of the greatest creations of world art of the past. Our Philharmonic Orchestras are conducting their current concert season with great success. Our soloist musicians, with their deep understanding of the musical works, continue to make us composers happy. Our demanding Soviet audiences avidly continue to crowd our concerts and plays.

This fact, so remarkable and pleasing to us, is terrifying for the Hitlers and Goebbels. We can proclaim to the world that during these days of bloody battles and ceaseless thunder of guns, music never became silent in besieged Leningrad. Art, which in any other country would have had to step aside at such times and find shelter in the quiet zones far from the fighting lines, became in our country a new type of armament striking the enemy. The people of our heroic cities, our great fortresses, our hamlets and villages, find their spiritual stamina for struggle in the inspired sounds of symphonies and songs, marches and oratorios. Such facts must bring us, Soviet composers, not only a sense of great satisfaction, but a sense of great responsibility.

During the period of this patriotic war, our composers have created a whole series of interesting works. The composers know that every new work, if written by the hand of a man who loves his country and who has found the proper colours for the

expression of his thoughts, is like a great salvo of fire at the enemy. While we love each other deeply, we demand at the same time a great deal from each other. And thus we find a great wealth and variety of types in our music, in all that we now write. From the simplest song to the great canvases of operatic and symphonic art, Soviet music performs a great and useful service to the country.

The task of our musical art consists in creating works consecrated to the present day and its great events. These works must be right up to the moment, sharp and exciting. But the timeliness of the theme does not mean that we may lower the standard demanded of the artistic content of the work. We must also create alongside the smaller works, great monumental pieces, great by their scale and magnificent by their content. We must learn from the great artists of the past how to serve our people in their hour of trials.

We have done a great deal of useful work, but we must do immeasurably more and better. We think too much of our future to stop at our present achievements. A great writer was once asked, "Which one of your works do you consider the best?" To which he replied, "It hasn't been written yet." We must be eternally dissatisfied with our achievements, great as they may be. This is much better than complacency or boastfulness. For us, these achievements must become only the impetus to still greater achievements, more persistent labour, new creative flights.

We Soviet musicians are constantly searching for new style. We must continue to go further and further ahead, ceaselessly perfecting ourselves, never for a moment stopping, never for a moment forgetting that

our art serves our people, is necessary for our people because it helps achieve victory.

We enjoy the greatest support of our state, we are surrounded by the care and love of the government and the people. We must justify the confidence reposed in us and the hopes placed on us. "Forward to new shores," said the great Russian composer Moussorgsky. "Forward to victory" is the slogan of Soviet musicians, the heirs and successors to the great traditions of world musical culture.

In "Mozart and Salieri," Pushkin ascribes the following thought to Mozart: "Genius and villainy, the two are incompatible." Whenever I recollect this sentence I think of the fate of Soviet culture, Soviet art, Soviet music. Our art is armed with the most humanitarian and advanced ideas. Its banners are inscribed with words full of burning love for our country, deep faith in humanism, intellect and light. These noble ideas, which have inspired all thinking mankind in all periods of history, will help us to create works worthily reflecting our epoch.

The war which we are now conducting against Hitlerism is the war of humanism against hatred of mankind, culture against barbarism, light against darkness, justice against falsehood and faithlessness. All these great and high concepts rule the thoughts of Soviet people, among whom are those who have chosen the arts as their life work. And they are working hard for the glory of their country. This work is succeeding. We hear its echoes in the thunder of artillery music accompanying our fighting battalions. We see its reflections in the land recaptured from the enemy and returned to our country. And it is this labour, the labour of the worker and the peasant, the engineer and the artist,

the teacher and the composer, multiplied by the bravery and the courage of the warrior, that will bring us final victory.

This war is a great and, I should say, general test for our artists, musicians, authors, scientists. Only those of strong spirit and courageous heart can pass this test with honour and good name. The war has imposed a great mission upon every one of us. There are not and there cannot be in our country any citizens aloof from this great struggle. "Everything for the front, everything for victory," is the slogan for men and women. The self-sacrifice of the workers, the hardest labour of the collective farmer, the persistence of the scientist, the courage of the constructor, the lyricism of the poet, the creative flight of the composer—all must be consecrated and freely given, to the last drop, to our sacred aim for which we live and breathe, for our victory.

British Ballet —

then and now

by Fernau Hall

NOT SO LONG AGO ENGLAND SHOWED every sign of developing into the ballet centre of the world. Public interest was enormous: in London as many as three companies played simultaneously to packed houses, and the larger provincial cities were not

far behind. Books on ballet burgeoned in the shops, columnists purveyed chatty items about forthcoming productions, and leading ballerinas had almost the news value of a Dionne quin or a giant Panda. To anyone who had followed the excellent and fruitful work of British choreographers and companies in previous years, this wave of interest was not surprising; in fact, it was only the more exotic radiance of the Ballets-Russes which prevented the true value of the homegrown variety from being recognised much earlier.

But a time came when even the worst snobs could not ignore the glories of our new native tradition. At Sadlers Wells the complete three-act *Lac des Cygnes*, with the incomparable Margot Fonteyn as Odette-Odile, made the jumbled pot-pourri of extracts exhibited by either "Russian" company seem no more than a suite of divertissements; in the contemporary repertoire, Ninette de Valois' *Checkmate*, arranged to fine uncompromising music by Arthur Bliss, was with all its faults a healthy counterblast to the decadent and pretentious sensation-mongering of some of the later Massine works, and Ashton's satiric triumphs like *Facade* and *Les Patineurs* were as fresh as ever. At Toynbee Hall, Antony Tudor's extraordinary masterpiece *Dark Elegies* opened up completely new spheres of dance expression, generating a strange intensity of tragic atmosphere with a vocabulary of movement which for once was both original and successful. At the Ballet Club, Andree Howard created in *Lady into Fox* an animal-human blend as vivid and compelling as anything by Disney. In each case there was an alliance of creative choreography, sensitive interpretation, intelligent contemporary music, and witty décors which suggested more than they described; and the

audiences responded with fitting enthusiasm.

But ballet sprung from classical roots had by no means a monopoly of the British stage. The Jooss-Leder school at Dartington trained a company, mainly of men, which reached a pitch of stylised perfection that should have been a model for the others, and in the Jooss ballets long stretches of slightly adapted classical steps were interrupted occasionally by brilliant flashes of Central European expressiveness. The Laban Wigman style, undiluted by classical imitations, could be seen in all its craggy strength at the Mask Theatre in the dance-dramas of Ernest Berk—particularly his Tibetan epic *Djoazanmo*. The American branch of the "Modern Dance" was to be followed from time to time in the recitals of Margaret Barr, Louise Soelberg and Agnes de Mille; less varied in style than the Central Europeans, and less polished in technique, they had a solid stratum of social feeling which saved them from the recurrent sentimental hysteria of their Continental colleagues.

A third branch of the dance, superficially even more exotic, was yet an important facet of British culture: this was the Indian ballet of Uday Shan-Kar. The home of the Shan-Kar Company was Dartington and the long runs of this company in London made many of us as familiar with the subtleties of the Indian style as we were with the details of the Cecchetti manual. Shan-Kar (like Ram Gopal) is a very accomplished choreographer: at a time when commercialised Nautch-girl dancing had sunk to approximately the artistic level of strip-tease, he went to the Ajanta cave-paintings for inspiration in producing an epic Indian style worthy of the finest traditions of a great artistic nation.

All that was four or more years

ago. Popular interest in ballet is even greater to-day; but what sort of ballets are offered to this enthusiastic and receptive audience? Let us embark for a swift conducted tour around a few representative contemporary works.

First we descend on a performance by the Sadlers Wells company of Robert Helpman's *Comus*. We are faced with long stretches of stodgy mime, varied at intervals by (a) class-worn arrangements of standard steps and (b) recitations of Milton by none other than the choreographer himself, presumably in the hope that a dancer talking would have the same news-value as a man biting a dog. Unfortunately for Mr. Helpman, no one wants to buy either a dog-biter or a talking dancer more than once.

Next on our list is Andree Howard's *Twelfth Night*, as produced by the International Ballet. It was inevitable that the fabulous success of *Romeo and Juliet* in Moscow should inspire a Shakespearean revival in British ballet; unfortunately the local imitators show no sign of having studied the immense labour of preparation and imaginative development which the Soviet artists undertook to enable them to bring out in pure dancing all the wealth of content (characterisation, situation, mood) to be found in the play. It is possible for anyone who knows his Shakespeare well to maintain a rough idea of what is happening during some parts of the performance of *Twelfth Night*: but since the characters are mainly differentiated from each other by their costumes, the ensembles are of the happily versatile kind which fit almost any ballet with the same number of participants, and the action is carried forward entirely by long stretches of obscure mime, the uninstructed spectator might well wonder if he

had come to the wrong theatre. Any resemblance between *Twelfth Night* and either Shakespeare or a living ballet is purely coincidental.

The curtain falls, the scenery shifts, and we find ourselves watching a performance of Mona Ingoldsby's *Endymion*. The title does not encourage us to expect any sparkling novelty of story or style, nor does the choreographer intend to provide any: she is apparently content to reproduce the same old hackneyed story without any contemporary vision, and puts it on the boards with the same old tattered gestures of conventional joy and wilting despair. The gloom is lightened at intervals by lonely flashes of genuine feeling, but most of the time her dancers drift about in a state of sentimental futility.

Our final call is a performance by the Ballet Guild of *La Petite Fadette*, a new pastoral by Molly Lake. With Europe in flames around her, the choreographer has chosen to direct her energies into a conventional tale of a village maid who is called rude names by her fellow villagers; for a long half-hour we share her agonies of soul, but all ends happily at last. The style is in part a pastiche of Massine and Ashton at their most empty and mannered; and it should not be long before Fadette does a fadeout.

If we were to visit the Anglo-Polish Ballet, we should find a rather different picture; working in restricted field, the various choreographers exploit the strong rhythms and vivid style of Polish folk-dancing with great effect. Here there is both smoke and fire; elsewhere, we have to be content with a kind of damp fog.

The newspapermen who represent the press at first nights generally refer to the new ballets as "agreeable," "entertaining" or "pleas-

ant," as if they were new methods of serving up Spam; and they have considerable justification. Choreography at this level can be reeled off by any competent teacher with no more effort than that applied by a cow to the secretion of milk, and the interpretative efforts of the dancers may appropriately be equated to those of a cook with the resultant cheese. This fatty degeneration of the imagination, this over-weening concentration on manner at the expense of matter, is a characteristic expression of formalism at its most sterile.

The extent of the decline from the golden pre-war days is easy to comprehend but difficult to explain. The war is not to blame: astonishingly lavish costumes and décor are to be seen at current new productions, and a sufficient minimum of men is still to be found. One factor, at least, is the artistic policy of the various companies, particularly that of the company which once so dominated the scene that it might well have been called the British National Ballet. For many years Ninette de Valois built up the Vic-Wells company into a position of great solidity, with a permanent theatre, a consistent and educated audience, and almost ideal conditions of working (regular daily classes, long and careful rehearsals, and only two well-prepared performances a week); but the iron exclusiveness which was useful during the period of development proved ruinous in more spacious times. Instead of encouraging the development of new choreographers, she and her fellow-directors saw fit to spend a fortune in money and over a year of hard work on the production of *The Sleeping Princess*—the overstuffed pink elephant that ruined Diaghilev

and was never a popular success. (It has dozens of scene-changes, hundreds of elaborate costumes, and thousands of steps, but not an ounce of real invention). With only a fraction of this money and time the Vic-Wells could have produced a score of unpretentious experimental ballets by promising unknowns; but so far from hiring a talent scout, Miss de Valois has not even shown any evident practical interest in her own pupils and dancers (apart from Robert Helpman). Choreographers are not necessarily good dancers—many of the best are quite second-rate; and a far-seeing maitre de ballet would have made efforts to provide an experimental studio where they could learn their trade.

The decline and fall of the London Ballet was made inevitable by Antony Tudor's departure to America soon after the war started: without new ballets the company was doomed, though under the brave leadership of Peggy van Praagh it put up a magnificent rearguard action. A ballet company, like a bullet, must move on continually: if it stops short it falls to the ground. The fate of the other choreographers and companies is lost in the fog of war.

As for our new maitres de ballet, they either lack ability or fritter it away on trivialities which exact from them no sweat of creative effort.

The future? Unsettled, but promising. I am convinced that the energies released in a mighty and successful effort to destroy the Fascist enemy will have an invigorating effect on all channels of expression in this country, including the one art which penetrates the human heart with the lyric majesty of a poem, the dramatic sweep of a play, the colourful drive of a painting and the emotional purity of music.

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Years of Soviet Cinema

HERBERT MARSHALL writes on this subject with authority, as he worked in the Soviet Union for seven years and is the only Englishman to have graduated from the Soviet State Academy of Cinema.

IN CONSIDERING THE QUESTION OF cinema and art in the Soviet Union one must always bear in mind the fundamental difference that exists between the U.S.S.R. and the rest of the world—its unified planned control of economic, political, cultural and artistic development. Throughout the history of the Party which was foremost in creating this new Society, and the genius which led it in the struggle, one will find, intermingled with economic and political decrees, similar serious and weighty resolutions on art and culture, and especially upon the art of the cinema. "For us the most important of all the arts is the cinema" was how Lenin put the question in 1919. And his suggestion was acted upon. From that time begins the history of the struggle for the Soviet cinema, economically and ideologically.

The cinema in Czarist Russia was on a very low level. It was a purely individual capitalist concern, producing crude melodramas of a poor quality compared with the imported American and German films with which the cinemas were mostly filled. At the revolution most of the entrepreneurs had fled, together with most of the cinema intelligentsia. All that was left in Moscow was a small studio with not much apparatus, still less a qualified staff.

Protazanov was the most well-known regisseur of the old regime who came over wholly to the Bolsheviks, and the owner of the second (and only other) film concern in Moscow, Hanszhonkov, handed over *en bloc* his whole concern to the Soviet Government and stayed to work in it as a technician.

Special cinema committees were organised, and the first play film to be made by them was prepared from a scenario by Lunarcharsky in 1918. The cinema concerns throughout the country were nationalised in 1919.

Up to 1922, films were produced by these committees, consisting mostly of newsreels of May-day demonstrations, scenes at the front, the famine, the congresses, etc., in connection with which the name of the pioneer of documentary film appears, Dziga Vertov. At the same time the State Institute of Cinema, founded in 1919, under the direction of Gardin (now People's Cinema Artist of the Republic) began producing short play-films with the group of Kuleshov.

Lenin placed great stress at that time on the importance of the documentary and newsreel film. This, however, was converted by Vertov and his school "Kino-Eye" into dogma, which he has persisted in up till to-day: "Only documental facts

—no play-film illusions—down with the actor and scenery—long live the film of actuality.” Thus were produced the weekly newsreels and short documentaries “Kino-Pravda,” the full length documentary films *One Sixth of the Earth*, *Strides of the Soviet*, etc.

Kuleshov, at the State Institute of Cinema, took the opposite view. He advocated the study of the American feature film, particularly the Westerns, and its adaptation to the Soviet Cinema. His first attempt at this was a copy of the Wild West thriller, entitled *Mr. West Visits the Soviet Union*, which showed the adventures of a tourist who visits the Union, fearing to be shot at every corner! One of the actors in the film, a student of the Institute, was Vsevolod Pudovkin, later to be one of the world's famous directors.

The next film was a sheer copy of the American detective film, with all the tricks of the camera, entitled *The Ray of Death*, presenting the plot of a counter-revolutionary organisation and its intrigues.

Pudovkin now relates with pride the terrible difficulties they overcame in order to make pictures in those early days. There was no coal, no fuel, no light, very little food, hardly room to work in. They studied in thick overcoats and felt boots, when they could get them! They had to gather together material for their scenery, etc. from all kinds of flotsam and jetsam. Even the projectors had to be hand made. Every possible thing had to be economised. They had to fight for every yard of film, for every kopek. This had, no doubt, some influence on the shortness of the shots in early Russian films.

Thus in the midst of hunger and blockade, of cold and poverty intervention and counter-revolution, Soviet cinema art was born.

Then came the reconstruction period. The wheels begin to turn, the factories to work, trains to move, buildings to go up—chaos became controlled. The Left Wing of the Prolet Cult Workers' Theatre produced its first film, directed by S. Eisenstein, called *Strike*. This was the first of the now famous Soviet “mass” films, showing the drama of the “collective” without any development or treatment of the individual. It was an inevitable reaction to the bourgeois film which portrays the opposite, an individual and his fate, isolated from the collective, ignoring the mass of mankind.

The roots of the style of *Strike* can be found in the methods of Meyerhold (in whose theatre Eisenstein worked for a while), and in the mass demonstrations of the Bolsheviks. It portrayed on the screen for the first time revolutionary ideology in a revolutionary form, carried later to a climax in the world-famous *Potemkin*.

I have already mentioned the planning of cultural and artistic development in the U.S.S.R. Sceptics say that this cannot be planned or controlled without detriment to the art. Yet it is interesting to note that the world-renowned silent films of the U.S.S.R. were practically all “made to order” of the Soviet Government. *Potemkin* was to be part of a series of films dealing with the 1905 revolution and was planned in conjunction with the Central Committee of the Soviet Government.

After his first apprenticeship with the Kuleshov group, Pudovkin made a film called *The Chess Player*, and a scientific film, *Conditioned Reflexes*, based on Professor Pavlov's researches. Then came *Mother*, adapted from Maxim Gorki's novel. Here we see the next development of Soviet

cinema, the beginning of individual characterisation, the form of types. The use of types, that is non-actors, or actors chosen principally for their appearance, whose acting so to speak is created in cutting (montage), later reached its limits in *Storm Over Asia* by Pudovkin; *The General Line* of Eisenstein; and *Ivan* by Dovszhenko.

When the country was well on the way towards reconstruction the first Five Year Plan was being born, a new Soviet youth was growing up, the problems of the new individual, the new psychology presented themselves more forcibly to the artist.

Pudovkin attempted to solve these problems in *Life Is Good*. He failed. Eisenstein was in America, studying Hollywood's technique. Meanwhile, another director of first rank emerges from the Ukraine, Alexander Dovszhenko, who combines the culture of Eisenstein and the emotion of Pudovkin with the passion of national originality. *Zvenigora* is a film of typical Ukrainian folklore, difficult for a non-Ukrainian to understand. Concurrently with the great historical films of Moscow and Leningrad, Dovszhenko made *Arsenal* a powerful film of the Ukrainian revolution, followed by *Earth*, probably one of the most superb of peasant films, showing the new order in the village, and the struggle for its creation merged with the eternal struggle of life and death.

In Leningrad, Kosintzev and Trauberg, after their historical Paris Commune film, *New Babylon*, also attempted to deal with new problems, and produced the antithesis of *Ivan*, a film *Alone*, in which the city intelligentsia goes to the village, fighting the age-old traditions, building a new society and at the same time themselves.

But life goes faster than the films. Soviet cinema industry still takes too long to make its full-length

pictures, anything from six months to three years, so it is not surprising that often the product is too out of date to be shown.

The introduction of the sound film applied the brake. Once more the Soviet cinema had to start at the beginning, both technically and artistically, to master in two or three years what the U.S.A. had been studying for fifteen years. For two or three years no film of significance emerged, nothing that can be compared with the best silent films.

The Second Five Year Plan commences—the country is now back to normal, goods appear everywhere in the open shops, the collective farms become the predominant form in the village, the harvest is the biggest on record, there are diplomatic successes abroad, fulfilment of plans for heavy industry—"The last year of difficulty"—such was the slogan of 1932.

With all this grows the increased demand for cultural entertainment, more plays, more music, more films, more life! And the lighter genre begins to appear. The themes of personal inter-relationships, of love, of the new attitude to work and society—these now come to the forefront, but without being isolated from the mass.

Counter-Plan by Ermiler and Yutkevitch, was the first sound film of significance dealing with these problems. But it remained in splendid isolation while other directors either meditated lengthily over their scenario period or else tackled the more difficult problems of personal characterisation through the classics, producing from Dostoievsky *Petersburg Nights*, directed by Roshal; from Ostrovsky *The Storm*, directed by Petrov; from Maupassant *Boule de Suif*, directed by Michael Romm, etc.

Of foreign directors working in the

Soviet Union it was Piscator who produced the outstanding sound film *Revolt of the Fishermen*, from the novel by Anna Segars, and Ivens and Marshall produced a documentary sound film about Soviet youth in industry entitled *Komsomol*, and Gustav Wangerhein a film of the Leipzig trial entitled *Fighter*, in which Dimitrov personally appeared.

Dziga Vertov, still persistent in his documentalism, now produced probably his greatest film, greatest because of its content, *Three Songs of Lenin*. Such a theme could not fail to arouse the emotions of Soviet audiences.

As a striking contrast appears *Jazz Comedy*, a jazz musical comedy film by Alexandrov (now working on his own) introducing this genre for the first time to the Soviet screen with, however, very little Soviet content. It shows that Moscow's Hollywood could do all the tricks of the American cinema. It was followed by *Circus*, which dealt with the problem of Jim-Crowism in the United States and the solution of the colour problem in the Soviet Union.

Then came a bombshell, a film by almost unknown directors which broke all records and filled the cinemas as no film had since *Potemkin* and caused more articles, more Press, more demonstrations than any film since the golden age of silent films—it was based on a theme that was generally considered to have become boring for Soviet audiences—the civil war. It turned upon the great friendship of a partisan hero, a legendary character "*Chapayev*," with the Party leader in his division.

A new quality had entered the Soviet cinema, a synthesis of the best of the silent films with a masterful character presentation and story.

The important thing is that *Chapayev* is not an isolated event, for following rapidly upon its heels are

The Youth of Maxim and *The Return of Maxim* by Kosintsev and Trauberg, dealing with the evolution of a Bolshevik in the 1905 period and *Peasants* by Ermler, dealing with collectivisation and the work of the Bolsheviks in the village.

With these fine films the Soviet cinema arrived at its fifteenth anniversary, and the Government and the Party showed their appreciation of its significance by rewarding the leading directors, cameramen, actors, administrators, etc., with the highest honours of the land—no other art has ever received so many titles. Among the list of those honoured we find the name of Hanszhonkov, the former Russian capitalist who has now been given a life pension by the Soviet Government for his services to the revolutionary cinema.

Alexandrov then made a film entitled *Volga Volga*, which is a review of the folk art of the Soviet peoples on the background of Russia's greatest river.

Since that anniversary there have been several films of outstanding significance. *New Gulliver* is undoubtedly the finest puppet film ever made, and at the same time a full length feature film. The producer, Ptushko, received the title "Honoured Worker of Art" for his work, which took over two years in making. He is now preparing a coloured puppet film.

The historical costume drama (reflections of the classic German films) is represented by the film *Peter the Great*, based on a scenario specially written by Alexei Tolstoy. The film shows Peter not merely as a tyrant, but as a ruthless representative of the progressive elements of the society of his day, fighting against the age-long backwardness of Mother Russia, scheming for developments which were only realised after the October Revolution. This was one

of the most lavish productions of the last ten years, equalling Hollywood in its employment of thousands of actors.

Just as Russian films have influenced Hollywood, so the converse has happened, as may be seen in Alexandrov's productions. Then came a film which might be termed the "Beau Geste" of Soviet Asia, entitled *Thirteen*. It was dedicated to the Red Army on the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution. Its director is one of the younger school of the Soviet cinema, Michael Romm. It deals with the fate of thirteen people crossing the deserts of Soviet Asia near the foreign border. The film is sustained at a high level of dramatic tension and compares quite favourably with Hollywood productions.

A remarkable film for the twentieth anniversary, *The Last Night*, was produced by another young director, Raizman. The action takes place at the end of October, 1917, during the last night in Moscow before that city followed Petrograd in revolt. It affords another example of highly concentrated action in a very limited time, developing every character to the fullest extent. These last two films present an interesting contrast to those made for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, namely *Ten Days That Shook the World* and *The End of St. Petersburg*, which had an action extending over a long period of time with very little development of character. *We From Kronstadt* by Dzigan and Vishnevsky, is the only modern film comparable in form as well as content with the classic silents. It has been widely reviewed in London and needs no further comment.

A film that has received more acclaim in the last year is *Lenin in October* by Michael Romm, who made *The Thirteen*. By its title it challenges

comparison with Eisenstein's famous *October* but cinematically it will not bear comparison. One of the greatest actors in the Soviet Union, Schukin, plays Lenin with extraordinary fidelity, but though one pays tribute to his wonderful make-up, voice and gesture, there is a tendency to be too self-conscious and deliberate. The film is notable in portraying for the first time Stalin, Dzerjinsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and others at their famous meeting on the eve of the Revolution, when Lenin attacked Zinoviev and Kamenev for their betrayal of the Central Committee's decision. This film was very popular in the Soviet Union, but as a work of art it lacks imagination and inspiration. One is too conscious that everything has been checked up with documents and facts.

Then as the danger of Fascist aggression drew near stress is laid on the military defence of the Soviet Union. A new film by the makers of *Chapayev* called *Volchayev Days* deals with the invasion of the Soviet Far East by Japan in 1921 and their defeat, with an obvious implication for future conflicts. Another film entitled *For Soviet Fatherland*, deals with Soviet Karelia and the struggle of the Finnish partisans led by Toiv Antikinen, imprisoned in Finland for Revolutionary activity and released after the Russian-Finnish war. Another film deals with "Komsomolsk," the new town of youth created on the Amur River, a heavy industry base for the defence of the Far East, and Pudovkin made "Field Marshal Suworov" one of the great military strategists of Russia, and "Minin and Pozharsky," two great patriot defenders of old Russia; and Eisenstein made a film on a legendary leader of the Russian peoples, *Alexander Nevsky*, with an obvious modern moral. Alexander Nevsky defeated and utterly routed German invaders

in the thirteenth century. The scene that Eisenstein filmed is extraordinary as a spectacle. An unexpected attack by Alexander on the Germans, forces them to retreat across a frozen lake which cracks under the weight of their accoutrements, and they are engulfed. For this, Eisenstein had a special artificial iced lake built. The "German invaders" were members of a school of physical culture dressed in thirteenth century costume. The whole of the engulfing was conducted by military engineers. The ice weighing 17½ tons was floated on hidden rubber pontoons. At the command of an officer, hidden from the camera, the "invaders" slowly let out the air from the rubber pontoons, which gradually sank with the soldiers. Immediately the scene was shot there was a roll call to make sure that nobody remained under the ice. All precautions were taken, with expert life-savers, divers and safety-first men. The whole scene was shot without any untoward incident. This film has just been dubbed into English and will be shown for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations in London.

The five years immediately preceding the war was remarkable for the number of film sequels produced in Soviet studios. The second half of *Peter the Great* was issued. The rise of the Bolshevik Party was portrayed in a trilogy, based on the leading character, Maxim, produced by the famous pair Kozintsev and Trauberg. The youth of Maxim Gorky was faithfully portrayed in another trilogy, the last part of which, *My Universities*, was recently shown at the Tatler Cinema, London. The quality of these productions and the perfection of character acting, make them seem almost documentary in their reality. Every aspect of Russian as well as Soviet history is being reflected in present Soviet films.

Eisenstein is preparing *Ivan the Terrible*, in which the cordial relationships with England then existing are dealt with. The defence of Tsaritsyn (Stalingrad) is shown in a Kiev (evacuated) Studio Production, shortly to be shown at the Tatler. Part Two is in production. Another Kiev production deals with the same subject, from the angle of "Parkhomenko," a famous Soviet Commander, fighting Makhno, a bandit Ataman. A beautiful children's film *The Lone White Sail*, deals with events immediately following the Potemkin revolt.

Musical comedies are being produced more and more, following on Alexandrov's pioneering. Pyrev who made *The Rich Bride* has made the loveliest Soviet musical yet seen, *The Swineherd and the Shepherd*. Apart from the inevitable quality of sincerity and fine characterisation, always present in Soviet films, it has the tempo and polish of American musicals, and it utilises the variety of Soviet countryside from frozen steppes of the North to the craggy mountains of the southern Caucasus, and the impressive Soviet Agricultural Exhibition held in Moscow in 1939. Alexandrov presents Cinderella up to date in *The Bright Path*, with Orlova scoring a hit for her acting and singing, though the producer still cannot rid himself of artificiality in much of his treatment. Probably one of the finest films to come from the Soviet Union in the last three years, was *The New Teacher*, directed by Gerasimov. It deals with the continuing education of the countryside through characters that are superb in their presentation and beautiful in their humanity. It contains one of the loveliest love scenes in cinema, as far removed from Hollywood artificiality as a wild rose is from a chocolate box cover.

A fine example of cinema bio-

graphy was the film *Red Flyer*, based on the life of the daring pilot who first flew over the Pole to U.S.A. In this film is one of the finest characterisations of Stalin yet seen. It has been generally released with English dialogue.

Since the war the Soviet Cinema has mobilised all its forces for work of national importance. Over 160 cameramen are filming in the vast front lines of the struggle. Many have lost their lives. They not only make newsreels, but their work is edited into full-length films such as *One Day In Soviet Russia* shown here with Quentin Reynolds commentary, and a similar film has been made, photographed simultaneously by all these cameramen on June 13th, 1942. It will be shown for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations. The Documentary and Newsreel Studios record systematically the whole of the war activity, from the historical and technical point of view. *The Defeat of the Germans Near Moscow* has already been seen here. *The Defence of Leningrad* will be shown for November 7th. *The Battle of Sevastopol* will shortly be ready, and no doubt *The Defence of Stalingrad* will soon be received !

The usual production of full-length features continue most of them with direct reference to the present struggle, as for example in *The Rear of the Enemy* and *Natasha*, both released with English dialogue.

But an interesting war-time innovation is the speed-up in production, by division of labour, whereby all featured directors make shorts, two

or three reel play-films, and they are tied up with some transitional scenes into feature length. This enables a film to be made in one third of the time, as three directors are shooting simultaneously for the same film. The first shorts were issued separately (with English dialogue) *One Hundred for One*, *Stronghold Forty-two*, *Three in a Shell-hole*, etc. Now the first full length is being dubbed into English entitled *Guerillas and Heroes*, it contains episodes from the Russian front, the Guerillas in the rear, and the underground struggle in Yugoslavia. One short was produced by Pudovkin, the famous Soviet director and is a superb work. These shorts cover the whole international field of anti-Nazi struggle, and not just the Soviet front.

The very nature of the Soviet State assures that all its means of artistic expression is directed to a common end, the defeat of Nazism. The cinema director, actor, and cameraman is as much a soldier in the struggle as the Red Army Man, in fact in most cases he probably is one at the same time. Because of this there has been no lag in switching over to war activity, no private arguments about "escapist" or non-escapist themes, no slavish imitations by one studio of another studio's popular success, no waste of man-power, no frittering away of power in a dozen different and competing directions. In war as well as peace Soviet cinema is a planned and co-ordinated part of the whole national struggle, summed up in the popular phrase "All for the Front ! All for Victory !"

Rise, Decline and Fall

of French Music *by James Gibb*

The French National Committee did a great service in presenting their series of three concerts of French music (from Chabrier to "Les Six") in London recently. We were given the opportunity of hearing some of the finest French music which is hardly ever played in this country. But even more, the series gave an historical panorama which presents some striking parallels for us to-day. We can learn from them.

NO ONE COULD ATTEND THESE concerts without a certain sense of anti-climax. Nor could one escape a feeling of bewilderment at the thought that such a renaissance of French music as ushered in this century should peter out with the intimate experiments of "Les Six." France, too, enjoyed a period of intense popular interest in serious music, something akin to what we are beginning to experience now. Perhaps we can learn something from a few observations about the rise, decline and fall of "French music."

Romain Rolland has paid tribute to the great pioneering work of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, set up during the war of 1870 for the promotion of French music. Started through the initiative of a group of musicians, its early meetings were interrupted for a few months by the events of the Paris Commune

Activities were resumed, however, in October, 1871. This is how they defined their object. "The aim of the Society is to aid the production and the *popularisation* of all serious musical works, whether published or unpublished, of French composers: to encourage and bring to light, so far as is in its power, all musical endeavour, whatever form it may take, on condition there is evidence of high, artistic aspiration on the part of the author. . . . It is in brotherly love, with complete forgetfulness of self and with the firm intention of aiding one another as far as they can, that the members of the Society will co-operate, each in his own sphere of action, for the study and performance of the works which they shall be called upon to select and to interpret."

The Society had for its vice-president the composer, Saint-Saëns, and its first Committee contained

such figures as César Franck, Fauré and Lalo. These pioneers were fully conscious of the fact that the future of French music lay not only in the hands of the composers and executants, but of the public which would listen to their works as well. In particular, Saint-Saëns gave warning against the dangers of setting up a coterie of mutual admirers, performing each other's works and becoming more and more exclusively specialised in writing "music for musicians." They realised that music bore no automatic recognition in the organisation of the State, and could not expect to be supported merely for the asking. This would have to be fought for. The work of the Society for the next thirty years had its effects. Hardly a single of the great works produced by French composers did not find its place in the work of the Society, and the example set by their initiative inspired many similar ventures. Symphony concerts at very cheap prices, chamber music societies, choral societies, made their appearance. The public for them increased. Victor Charpentier, brother of the composer of "Louise," the opera of Paris working-class slums, did a great service in founding an amateur Symphonic Society called "L'Orchestre" to give free performances for the people. Paris became the leading musical centre on the continent.

It was during this upsurge of interest in serious music that the influence of Wagner spread over the whole of the artistic life of France. Even such a typical and boisterous Frenchman as Chabrier succumbed to it and joined the ranks of "monkey Wagners," with their meek imitations of the great German Romantic. Out of this atmosphere the most original of French composers, Debussy, emerged.

It was his mission to free French

music from the domination of Bayreuth. Early in their friendship, fellow-composer Satie had pointed out to Debussy: "We should have music of our own—if possible without any Sauerkraut." In fact Debussy's early development could well be described as "The flight from Sauerkraut." Sauerkraut being understood as French for Wagner. This opera "*Pelléas et Mélisande*" was a conscious negation of the best-known features of Wagnerian opera. Emotions, instead of being proclaimed roundly to the back seat of the gallery, were but dimly suggested. You can never feel that Debussy is taking an active and direct part in the emotional conflicts, but only recollecting vaguely a past experience. Yet there is something peculiarly French about the intensely personal, sincere style he evolved. He was certainly successful in turning young French composers away from Wagner. Nevertheless what he had to offer in its place did not lead to sustained positive results. In fact, one of the aims of that group of composers, which for apparent publicity purposes called itself "*Les Six*," was to abjure the vague mistiness of Debussy, and aim for complete clarity and simplicity of line.

Debussy is reported to have made sarcastic remarks about what was called the "democratization of the Arts." In fact, the increased popular demand for music felt during the last war appeared to grow parallel with an increasing specialisation and complexity in the composers. They seemed to belong nowhere. The effect of their music on a general audience ceased to be of concern to them. Instead, composers met in small groups with a select set of admirers to perform their works to each other. It was in this intimate, friendly atmosphere that "*Les Six*"

used to meet in a studio of the Rue Huyghens. Cocteau was their spokesman, insisting on clarity of line and the use of "Parisian folk lore." Perhaps the general popularity of music at this time was responsible for the suggested use of Parisian folk lore; but, in any case, the results of Poulenc and Auric in attempting it fell flatly and heavily between the low and high-brow stools, for all their subtlety and finesse in craftsmanship. The aims of this group, pathetically enough, can only be termed in negatives.

It is interesting to turn our eyes at the same time to Vienna where, in November, 1918, a much less flippant, but even more specialised group of composers was established: "The Society for Private Musical Performances," under the leadership of Arnold Schönberg. According to their statement of aims, "The performances must be removed from the corrupting influence of publicity; that is, they must be unaccompanied by applause, or demonstrations of disapproval. . . . The performances shall be in all respects private; that guests (foreign visitors excepted) shall not be admitted, and that members shall be obligated to abstain from giving any public report of the performances and other activities of the Society, and especially to write or inspire no criticisms, notices, or discussions of them in periodicals."

In these surroundings music has become choked by its own com-

plexity. The air is so rarified, it can no longer breathe. Can we in this country avoid the separation into two camps—composers and public, which has had such a paralysing effect upon western European music?

The increased public for concerts the formation of orchestras and bands in the Forces demonstrate the general need for music as an essential part of the war effort, though it is not officially recognised as such. The B.B.C.'s important pronouncement of policy referred to in the Press as the "Anti-Slush Campaign" recognises that music can have a positive effect upon the morale of the nation. Once the composer has a recognised social status, we can see a settled future for the practice of contemporary music. The nostalgic harking back and satirical smirking at previous music, so characteristic of this work to-day, cannot last much longer. It is the position of loneliness, frustration, and of not being "required" that has sickened his work. Give him the knowledge that his talents can be useful in the noblest of all causes, and our music will not suffer the fate of our French and Viennese colleagues. It is interesting that in July, 1918, four months before Schönberg's Society for Private Musical Performances in Vienna was formed, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Russian Soviet Republic formed a Music Division with Arthur Louÿré as Commissar of Music.

Summons to Artists

This article is reprinted from *Soviet War News*, February 16th, 1942, and is an extract from the Soviet National newspaper *Pravda*.

IT IS NOT ONLY FACTORIES, WORKSHOPS and collective farms that are to-day helping the Red Army to smash the enemy. We know what a tremendous part is also played in our defence by the political education of the masses. Day by day our press, our literature, songs, music, theatres, paintings, posters and films are helping our people to organise their forces for the war. That is why we are justified in making high demands of all forms of Soviet art.

Co-ordinated action by all arms was of decisive significance in the battles for Moscow, Leningrad, Sevastopol, Rostov and hundreds of other towns and villages. Our strength resides in this co-ordinated activity by all sections of the Red Army. But art, too is a weapon which must to-day be applied completely to the service of the Red Army.

Twenty-four years of Soviet power have shown the part played by artists in the most difficult periods of the life of our people. Not long ago the entire country followed with great emotion the filmed speech made by Stalin at the meeting of the Moscow Soviet on November 6th, and his speech at the Red Army parade on November 7th. Millions of people lived through an unforgettable experience. The impression left by the film was tremendous.

Another documentary film is now coming to the screen, *The Defeat of the German Troops before Moscow*. This film shows with exceptional

force the men and commanders of the Red Army and their unshakeable confidence in the victory of our cause.

Let our playwrights, too, use all their genius so that our actors from the theatre stage may inspire the people with burning patriotic images, with sharp satire against the enemy, with songs and music:

Our playwrights are indebted to the people. They have not done sufficient to enable our theatre, which possesses such glorious traditions, to march in step with the Red Army.

Many but far from all our poets have found words to present the image of these grim days to our people. Let them write as Mayakovsky dreamed, making the pen the bayonet's equal, so that their words may fire men's hearts as did the poems of Pushkin and Lermontov.

Let playwrights and composers, poets, writers and painters praise the heroic deeds of the Red Army and the entire Soviet people. Their creations in these days of war, in the service of the Red Army, will hasten victory over the enemy.

Let them inspire the entire people and our Red Army to further relentless struggle, so that our warriors march to battle with songs of joy, courage and terror to the enemy. Every picture painted by the artist, every scene shot in a film, every newspaper column written by a novelist or poet must be a well-placed shot against the enemy.

The Theatre and the Audience

by Beatrix Lehmann

AUDIENCE ATTENDANCE IN THEATRES all over the country has never been better. Productions are either lined up or lying fallow for want of a theatre in which to present themselves in the West End of London. Touring productions and try-outs circle the provinces for eighteen, twenty weeks or more. Managers clamour for the services of the outstanding talent now so narrowed down by the call-up. Outside the commercial theatre dramatic ventures and non-profit-making schemes show a new and vital activity. Many of the conditions that closed theatres in the earlier phase of the war are now absent. Briefly it can be stated that the conditions most detrimental to theatre attendance were the intensive aerial attacks, the evacuation and dispersal of audiences, the black-out and (overshadowing all), the uncertainty and confusion in the public mind over the reasons, conduct and aims of the war.

After the Nazi attack on the U.S.S.R. in the June of 1941, the war situation was decisively altered; "the attack was drawn from us" and an ally, whose united determination in resistance and attack and unhesitating statement of aims, brought a feeling of hope and confidence. This was immediately reflected in the theatre. Where before managers had not known what to "put on" in order to entice audiences into theatres, they now found themselves hard put to it to find enough material to supply the demand that was not so much for

any particular type of play as for entertainment in general. It is only now appearing more clearly what type of entertainment is most popular with the majority and most likely to bring profit to the commercial theatre.

From the point of view of good taste, vital topicality and cultural standards, the picture is not a happy one. The cynical and the embittered are once more railing against the public and throwing direct responsibility on the audience for the low standard. It would be as well, before allocating blame to any one of the component parts that are necessary to a living theatre, to examine the recent history of this much abused art, its organisation, the demands made upon it and its relation (actual and potential) to the people as a whole in their united war effort now and their spiritual good for all time.

For a great number of years the theatre public has been only a very small section of the nation. Outside of music halls very little good quality entertainment has ever been offered to the working classes or the lowest income groups. It has become a matter of habit to look upon attendance at first class theatres, particularly in the West End of London, as either the privilege or the idiosyncrasy of the well-to-do. Admittedly these theatres have cheap seats (although they compare badly with the cheap seats in a cinema where sound is magnified), but no manager could present a play for long to a

full pit and gallery and empty stalls. This has influenced the type, or content, of dramatic material. Managers, landlords, agents (to name only a few of those who do no work in the theatre itself) all live upon the theatre, claiming division of profits and fearing losses. Their only contact with the audience is through the box office. The audience pays or stays away. They must be enticed. There is no knowing what the audience really wants—they are always letting theatre business down in the most surprising way. Hollywood has proved that publicity when practised as the art of deception can go a long way towards ensuring financial success. Ready-made fame, a film star slipped into the cast of a play will bring the audience in, for a time. Obviously the audience is looking for a guarantee of quality, and publicity everywhere is always telling them what they are buying. "Risk" and "chance" are words frequently used in theatre business. No risk is taken, of course, with the Lord Chamberlain's office, who is more likely to blue-pencil the real than the suggestive.

The Lord's Day Observance Society, upholding a senile and pointless law, sees to it that the public performance of plays is forbidden on the day called The Sabbath, so that a large section of the people are thereby unable to attend theatres. (In fact a man who works six days may go to a public house on the seventh, but not to the play.) No "risk" is taken with the performers, as the best talent in the country is available to the commercial theatre. The only risk is that the unknown quantity—the audience—in spite of publicity will not support the play. Suddenly a particular type of play makes a "box office success"; twenty other managers, plus half a

dozen conjured up playwrights, produce copies of this type. As long as there are a few definite successes amongst the whole batch, managements will continue to exploit the trend, endeavouring to capture the audience who appear to be in the mood for settling down in one theatre or another to consume, at so much a head, this particular type of theatrical goods. There will be a spate of musicals, little revues, murder thrillers, or bedroom comedies. Productions, after a "long run," will sometimes change hands and be shown at slightly cheaper prices with a less expensive cast or cut rates for the original ones.

Managers, convinced by box office returns, either in their own theatre or another manager's theatre, will not unnaturally now say that this is what the public wants. After a long time the audience suddenly gets bored with the repetition, a £5,000 production goes down the drain and all is gloom and despondency in some offices adjacent to Leicester Square or Shaftesbury Avenue. That shy, unpredictable animal, the public, has disappeared again and only new "risks" and "chances" will entice it back. Sometimes, even at a peak period, the audience will disappear without warning for a few weeks, or long enough to ruin the chances of a play that had promised rich returns. Some exterior circumstance appears to have influenced them as a cloud across the sun makes day-old chicks run for shelter. Hot weather, cold weather, a Stock Exchange slump, a royal wedding, a royal funeral, a political crisis—theatrical circles vaguely murmur possible reasons for the lack of appetite, but nobody is convinced. It is a mystery and part of the insecurity of an actor's or manager's life.

Let it be noted that the most

important opinion is never heard. The audience registers its likes and dislikes through the medium of the box office, but collectively it is completely inarticulate. Its collective advice is not sought and its collective opinion is not voiced. Cat-calls and "the bird" are not unknown but it is never taken very seriously, for though it may ruin one play or one individual, the scandal soon dies down and the piece may even appear again, slightly altered, slightly re-cast, or in another theatre.

Until a very short while ago there was a preponderance of revivals. Owing to lack of new dramatic material, old plays, both "musical" and "straight," poured into the theatres situated in the larger towns all over the country. All that was known was that there was now an enormous demand for entertainment and the audience was larger than it had ever been before. Some positive and healthy changes took place. Firstly, the commercial theatre that had once centralised the first class productions almost entirely in the West End of London, began to tour the provinces a little more regularly than they had before. The old difference between a provincial and a London audience had disappeared. The population had shifted, merged, money had changed hands, the tight nucleus of a sophisticated "stalls" public had scattered, there only remained a large fluid mass prepared to receive entertainment here, there, everywhere. New differences appeared: communities where no large theatres (or even no theatres at all) existed appeared as virgin soil where entertainment of a higher cultural standard might be sown; village halls, hostels and parks were the new stages. The subsidised and non-profit-making schemes began to grow and prosper. One thing is now clear. The people need entertain-

ment for their limited leisure. Some have known the "art" theatre, some the superficial one, many have never known the theatre at all. The volume of theatrical entertainment is in "musicals." Does the audience want more topical plays? A few excellent plays of this kind have been risked by the commercial theatre and a few playwrights have at long last geared their talent to actuality and truth. New, carefully thought out productions of the classics have appeared. The audience everywhere is showing an unsuspected appreciation for good music, painting and ballet; the theatre drew comfort from these signs.

But the topical plays and the classical productions are not by any means an unqualified success. The escapist, the meretricious, the suggestive are better attended. One demand can be clearly nailed down: the entertainment, whatever it is, must be efficient, slick and well presented. Troops presented with shoddy talent are rightly resentful. The bulk of audiences everywhere seems to want to laugh, to relax and to remain intellectually and emotionally unstirred. Music can be enjoyed without conscious mental effort, so can dancing and painting; but a play that demands close attention, attacks feeling, stimulates thought and judgment and provokes collective reaction as it unfolds, still cannot be accepted as *entertainment*. A minority with some education in the drama and consciously demanding mental and spiritual stimulus from the theatre will accept such plays, and the realistic performance of them, enthusiastically; but they are too small, too scattered an audience to ensure success. The majority who have received no serious dramatic education either at school or in adult life, who over too long a period have not only possessed

no theatre of their own but have had the existing one thoroughly misrepresented to them by salesmanship and publicity, do not know how to approach an art that wakes the intelligence instead of putting it to sleep.

Long years of insecurity, frustration, unemployment, leave a mark upon the mind as well as the body, and when no effort was made to heal these scars or prevent their recurrence, it is not surprising that the theatre became, like the cinema, a place for forgetting, a place where the sharp edge of reality could be dulled, a place where things appear, not as they are, but as a child might wish them. Stuff of this kind was produced in such volume that finally the public accepted it. And now as the people draw more closely together in the face of the great common danger, as old grievances are forgotten, isolationisms broken down, everywhere the voice of the people is heard as it was never before. Discussion groups, Brains Trusts, Anglo-Soviet Committees, spring up everywhere on the initiative of the people themselves, displaying a need for knowledge, thought, facts, solidarity in aims and outlook—an awakening to the true democratic right of a free people to express itself by an informed, majority voice in the direction of its affairs.

This same people can become articulate in the direction of the theatre for the common good. It can make the theatre elastic to its immediate needs, and the voices of experts in the actual, living work of the theatre can inform, guide and

clarify the audience, drawing them into theatres to be awakened, stimulated and encouraged. This is no matter of a blue-print for after the war, but of something that can be done by audience and theatre together quite openly and not through the dictatorship of the box office or the philanthropy of a few individuals.

The State has already shown a willingness to subsidise the non-profit-making schemes. C.E.M.A. (The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) administers grants and guards the cultural standards of many entertainment units whose not least important virtue is their mobility. Troops can be better served by a demand for a steady flow of the best productions from the civilian theatres in place of the shoddy stuff so often presented for their disapproval. Greater mobility can be achieved if the audience demands it. The theatrical profession is anxious to give a wider service and break down the false barriers between itself and the audience. Block bookings and discussion groups, lectures and debates with time for questions and answers, performances for schools, have made a small beginning. The people can make great demands on the theatre, they can give it health and resilience and draw great comfort and strength from it once it is fully realised that the true place and work of the living theatre in the midst of the united people mobilised against fascism is to be a generous provider of healthy entertainment, mental and moral stimulants and the reflection of all that is truest and best in man.

Hitler or Mendelssohn? *by H. G. Sear*

IN 1842 THE KING OF PRUSSIA commissioned Mendelssohn to provide incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 1934 the leader of the National-socialist Kulturgemeinde, Dr. Walter Strang, commissioned Rudolf Wagner-Regeny to compose new settings for the same play to replace Mendelssohn's. Not on aesthetic but on racial grounds, of course. *Die Musik* (Nov. 1, 1934) expressed admiration, not of the music, but of Dr. Strang's action in discharging an important obligation of the National-socialist Revolution. Mendelssohn's music, it was declared, is inadmissible in the third Reich, where the unshatterable laws of racial purity must be uncompromisingly maintained.

Now Mendelssohn's music is easily assailable on an aesthetic basis. Hitler's beloved Wagner was well aware of this although he was compelled to qualify some of his strictures. And Hitler is said to have found the *Dream* music frivolous. That, too, is understandable, especially in Hitler, who, at any rate, is believed to require substantiality in his fairies. Theatrical fashions vary considerably. At one time a paunchy audience is only to be satisfied with an opulence of decor, stage spectacle and, of course, music, to which it does not pretend to listen; at another ascetic witnesses preciously demand no more than a tucket and would spurn a sennet as ostentatious vulgarity. Cecil Sharp deprecated the use of Mendelssohn's music because the composer wrote it in the vein of a secular cantata, he thought. With that one can sympathise. I confess to an element of shock on

seeing in Novello's a copy bound in the familiar cover which since childhood I have associated with the late G. F. Handel and A. R. Gaul. Yet somehow the music stands firm, smiling serenely in the very face of Hitler, the National-socialist kulturgemeinde, Cecil Sharp, Rudolf Wagner-Regeny and all.

I am not going to advocate that future performances of the *Dream* in this or any other country should perpetuate Mendelssohn. Owing to a series of social upheavals that have given us world markets, Hitlers, big guns and blitzes we scarcely have the leisure for that kind of thing. And besides, time has dealt very fairly with this particular music which promises to outlive most of its rivals. For it has rivals; a score of them.

There are witnesses to the effect of the *Dream* music at different dates. Rebecca Mendelssohn tells of a little group in Berlin: Hiller, David, Gade and the young Joachim. All succumbed to the music's charms. There must have been some nice collaboration between composer and producer for the motive of surprise was happily effected. This little company, so far from exclaiming "Ah! but this is the work of a Jew. It nauseates me," agreed that deft turns such as the entry of the Clowns in Act II (*allegro comodo*) immediately following the scene of Hermia's search for Lysander (*allegro appassionata*) were not only irresistably ludicrous and apt, but beautiful. As for the dead march for Pyramus and Thisbe, Rebecca reports that "it is exactly like the mock preludes he (Mendelssohn)

plays when you cannot get him to be serious."

At the first performance of the music in this country, the critic to the Athenaeum thought it sounded "strange and uncouth" and "full of puerile conceits especially when the ass brays." But, although he was a furious fellow at times, he did not burst into a racial frenzy; and when he got to know the music better he thought it "the loveliest illustration in music ever given to Shakespeare."

Eventually the overture crossed the Atlantic; the parts but no score. The conductor used a violin part. He had never heard anything like those first four chords. Who has? He tried again but they sounded dreadfully out of tune. There was a laugh of derision and the work was actually abandoned. But no one gave vent to anti-semitic scorn. And to-day the whole world subscribes to a belief that this music is marvellous stuff.

Isn't it fortunate that the overture, source of all the rest, was conceived when Mendelssohn was sixteen. If he had composed it when he set to work on the incidental music there is a grave probability that we should have been denied the ass's bray which mingles human laughter with fairy graces. For Mendelssohn's sense of fun, always more active than his sense of humour, was far more exuberant than in his later years.

Frivolous, says Hitler! If he ever really heard poor Bottom's bray it may have touched his tenderest susceptibilities, for as we know, he brooks no rivals.

So now, Wagner-Regeny. Sixty-six pages of thickish scoring, clever and occasionally rhythmically subtle. But no open-hearted fun, no translation of us poor mortals to the land of faery, no ass's bray. Bottom and his base mechanic knaves strut a

little Teutonically. But does he not declare that his chief humour is for a tyrant's part? If Shakespeare is really a German poet, as has been claimed, then this musician is no true Aryan. Or is he? He has the marks. He fears the light of day. The Jew, Mendelssohn, did not. He dare not bray like a donkey. The Jew, Mendelssohn, had no such solemn fear. His melody is sterile even when the mortals lie down to sleep on their leafy couch in the lovely moonlit night. But the melody of the Jew, Mendelssohn, is fruitful. And he shrinks from the obvious splendours of the final scene. But Mendelssohn didn't. He enjoyed the jovial spectacle and the clear blaze of his wedding march is absolutely in keeping with Shakespeare's knowledge of audiences.

Perhaps Shakespeare isn't really a German poet after all. He may belong to the whole world. And so may Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music too. We know that this music belongs to the theatre. Yet it has such life of its own that the world is its stage. It may be that the world (which contains quite a lot of sensible people) doesn't regard blood as an art standard. Certainly in this instance it shows no signs of sharing the ideas of the National-socialist *Kultur-gemeinde's* as to "important obligations."

In the Soviet Union there have been instances of what is called State interference with artistic principles but never on the vaunted unshatterability of the laws of racial purity. Stalin has been known to hold out a directive to composers but he said nothing about blood.

In 1934 Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music was banned by Nazi fanatics but it will live long after the liquidation of those fanatics.

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